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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL CENTERS IN NEW YORK STATE

This is my own personal account of a trip taken on P&O funds and along with Everett C. Norberg, P&O, primarily to visit county agricultural centers. We took train to Ithaca on October 30, 1949, arriving October 31. We then went by automobile to Penn Yan, Mt. Morris, Batavia, Albion, Waterloo, Syracuse, New Hartford, Utica, Cobleskill, Oneonta, Binghamton, Owego, and Elmira, then back to Ithaca. At all points whether there were agricultural centers or not I checked on the distribution of and reaction to USDA. On November 5 we conferred in Ithaca with the State Extension committee on Agricultural Centers.

T. Swann Harding
Office of Information

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL CENTERS IN NEW YORK STATE

Over-all Picture

At a meeting the morning of November 5, 1949, with C. F. Crowe, assistant State leader of county agricultural agents; Martha Leighton, assistant State leader of 4-H Clubs; and Orrilla Wright, assistant State leader of home demonstration agents we learned that agricultural centers or agricultural and home-making headquarters of one sort or another now existed in 10 of New York's 56 counties, while another county, Monroe, was now raising money for one. However, 42 counties, including the 10 mentioned, have active committees on an agricultural center, and in 10 other counties still the Boards of Directors regard local headquarters as inadequate, a representative local view. In 29 counties local inadequacy is cited and a recognized problem exists.

We did NOT visit the following agricultural centers: Salamanca, Cattaraugus County, where the city owned an old movie, renovated and remodeled it at a cost of \$12,000 after a public referendum, and turned it over to the

Farm and Home Bureau and 4-H Club Association; Extension and PMA are in occupancy; SCS is still across the street. Westport, Essex County, where the building owned by the county has been turned over for use as an agricultural center with Extension, PMA, and the State forester in occupancy, and there is no local SCS office. Cooperstown, Otsego County, the home of baseball and James Fenimore Cooper, where exists the Clark family and the wealthy Clark Estate, derived from the invention of the bobbin for the sewing machine by a member thereof; the Estate entirely at its own expense and because of manifest public need, renovated an old residence and deeded it to the Association as headquarters for Extension; plans call for the Clark Estate later to add a wing to accommodate the other USDA agencies; the site is by the Farmers' Museum and the circumstances point to the last-will-and-testament route as one to explore in the matter of procuring funds for county agricultural centers. Saratoga, Saratoga County, where the Board of Supervisors appropriated funds to the Association to purchase a large residence then occupied by Extension, and which now also houses PMA and SCS district headquarters. Otherwise we encountered most of the existing patterns of creating agricultural centers, Coopersville being a notable exception we are very sorry to have missed.

The Trip Proper

We arrived in Ithaca early October 31 and went immediately to the office of Irving B. Stafford, State Conservationist, where we arranged for the car. We also visited the Extension office of William B. Ward at Cornell for further advice on itinerary and naturally passed the time of day with James S. Knapp and Nell B. Leonard.

We then proceeded to Penn Yan, Yates County, where, at 210 Liberty St., we found Ext and SCS in an old residence: G. C. Smith, agent; Webster Smith, Sr.

agent; H. W. Davis with SCS--the district conservationist is Dr. Geo. C. Moore.

But PMA was elsewhere.

The artificial inseminators were also in the building. / The nearest FHA super-

visor was Edward Radell, Canandaigua, Ontario County; he served more than one

county but maintained a desk in the Ext office at Penn Yan. There was no

organized home bureau when this building was taken over and there was inad-

equately space for certain Ext activities when Ext was renting quarters along

with SCS. The woman who then owned this residence at 210 Liberty was very

much interested in Ext work and offered her home to the Farm and Home Bureau

and 4-H Club Association at \$8,000, \$500 down and \$500 a year. The Committee

studying the center idea decided to buy after some investigation because pay-

ments could be made about as rent. Next the Home Bureau organized to occupy

3 empty rooms, but further remodeling is contemplated, and there is also a

long-distance plan for building an addition to serve as a small meeting room

and accommodate a demonstration kitchen. These are now serious lacks. It is

also felt that PMA should be housed here too, for when farmers call on busi-

ness with PMA they have to be directed elsewhere, which confuses and irritates

them--it is quite the general custom, and very naturally, for farmers to come to

Ext for everything. There is ample parking in the area of this center as there

was not in the more congested area where agencies formerly rented and where park-

ing costs were considerable items. Whereas many counties have to put on drives

and resort to all sorts of schemes to raise money, the path was easier here.

Maintenance of the building is in the main by the personnel and not too satis-

factory. Except for the down payment the remainder required for remodeling was

borrowed and repaid, the same as rent. The center has exemption from State and

county taxes, though it took a while to get the school tax removed, and 1/3

of these are still paid. SCS, FHA, and various quasi-official bodies use the

meeting rooms by arrangement. Farmers contributed about \$1200 to the building's

needs in one drive. We later visited the PMA office where Leon Taylor, a former Ext and 4-H man is in charge. USDA does not come here as it does to ALL SCS and Ext offices; this office was at 126 Main St. and fieldman Hunt was there on a visit. We then drove on to Mt. Morris that day and stayed overnight. All local dignitaries expressed themselves most favorably towards the center in Penn Yan and the workers there considered it advantageous in every way. This was quite generally true everywhere.

We visited Mount Morris, Livingstone County, on November 1. Here we found Ext, PMA, and SCS in one building at 158 Main St., and representatives of the breeder's co-op for artificial insemination as well. R. G. Parker was agent; Jack C. Creveling represented PMA and said no USDA reached them; Robert Walker represented SCS. The Federal Land Bank and The Production Credit Association were in the building too with Kenneth Winans in charge. The FHA supervisor made occasional visits and used the facilities but was not stationed here but at Avon. The Farm Labor Placement man of the NY State Employment Service has a desk. In 1941, Ext headquarters was rented space over some stores in a congested area, and the other agency offices were each located separately. Ext needed larger quarters; Geneseo is the county seat and it wanted the offices established there and tried very hard to draw them away from Mt. Morris. But the village of Mt. Morris came up with an offer to buy a residence, building on a meeting room, and rent it to the Association on a long-time lease at \$600 a year, where heated and maintained space could be sublet to other agencies on a leased basis. There is a building fund as well as a maintenance fund--and there is plenty of free parking space. The rentals from portions sublet exceed the \$600 required; the village heats the place and occasional schoolboy janitors and the personnel do what they can to maintain it. The phone book entry was

changed--a matter much too often overlooked--making it easy to find all the agencies; in many places the agencies are so scattered thru the phone book that it is all but impossible to locate all of them without going to the Ext set-up. The workers here like this center not only because they thus get better acquainted with one another and the type of work carried on by their respective agencies, but because farmers, who do not draw agency lines, are much better satisfied and less irritated when they can come to one place and get whatever assistance they need, whether from PMA, SCS, PCA, or Ext. When directed to run across town or to the next village they often become confused and irritated. Farmers repeatedly come to the Ext man for anything they want; he is pleased not to have to redirect them outside the building. Often farmers blame Ext for delay in matters which it does not handle; if a farmer can quickly and easily get at the proper agency it is far better. The local postmaster here wants a new P. O. and makes a canvass every now and then to see whether the agricultural people will come into it if he gets it--but a new building is not very likely to be erected soon. The agricultural people prefer their own separate building; often their hours of work are long or unusual and access to court houses or Federal buildings is difficult; here each responsible worker has a key and can keep his own hours as he wishes. Here in Mt. Morris we found joint addressograph, mimeograph, and folding machines. The meeting room was too small. SCS came in for subtle criticism by Ext--not as individuals but in general--because in direct Federal line and insufficiently influenced by local opinion.

The same day we continued to Batavia, Genesee County, where we found Ext, PCA, and SCS located at 420 East Main St. in a transformed old residence where there was an information desk and a wholly modernized interior. C. F. Handy was county agent; Carol Winkelbleck was in charge for SCS, and Arthur Boelker for PMA located elsewhere at 206 East Main St. Ext had formerly been located

in an old house owned by a shoe company. During the war they were given removal notice and the county wanted to tear the house down and rebuild; but the shoe company consented to await the end of the war before demanding removal. This trouble which was common to other agencies got all thinking about an agricultural center where they could be all together instead of confusing farmers and others by remaining scattered so as to give a seeming run-around to many farmers who wanted service. Parking even 3 or 4 blocks from the old offices was a major problem. First the idea of renting a bigger space downtown was explored, but next they decided a building site further removed from the heart of town would be wiser. The investigating committee stumbled onto an old place, a veritable ghost-house, which had been unoccupied for 25 years. As it was then it would have made an ideal place to haunt. There was an acre of ground attached and the idea was to demolish the residence and build, but engineers and architects who examined the structure found it fundamentally in good shape mainly because the roof had held up. They said save the walls and roof and remodel. The site committee managed to procure gifts of \$100 each from a number of wealthy farmers, then borrowed \$3500 and bought the place. Next contributions of \$6000 were raised to remodel. Later local leaders loaned their endorsement to Association paper to facilitate borrowing \$2500 from PCA--since they were farmers. A campaign to raise funds was undertaken and a variety of money-making schemes was used, as well as outright subscriptions, and to date \$34,558 had been secured in such ways. This sum went for remodeling which is still in progress. Then \$20,000 was borrowed on an ordinary real estate mortgage basis. One Farm and Home Spring Festival brought in \$2000 through the device of having a local movie theatre turned over to the fund for 1 week at a rental of \$200 a day to pay for the usual maintenance, all other income going to the center. There were

fairs and exhibits where space was sold to commercial concerns which brought in \$2000 in 1948. This included the auctioning off of gifts ranging from purebred cattle up and down, the proceeds all going to the fund. Such a roundup was elaborately repeated in 1949, and a net profit of \$6000 accrued. The old residence has been very substantially remodeled closely to resemble a modern office building inside, and the mortgage has been reduced to \$14,000; \$1200 was being spent in more remodeling when we were there and there still existed a reserve of \$1000 for contingencies. To date the building has cost roughly \$60,000 and the PMA is to move in as soon as third-floor changes are completed. There is a maintenance account into which the Farm Bureau pays \$600 a year, PCA \$1300, SCS \$594, Home Bureau and 4-H Club \$350 each, and to which the PMA will contribute \$300 or so to be determined. The cancer drive people pay \$300 a year to maintain space in the building after having found it so convenient when provided gratis during a drive. The artificial breeders and a milk and a soil testing laboratory are to come into the building later. The FHA holds meetings here as do the Vo-Ag teachers, the other agencies, and certain quasi-official bodies and organizations when convenient. There is a janitor headache and maintenance is rather high, but gas heats more cheaply than coal at \$350 a year and dispenses with the furnace man. However, the lights are costly and old-style, not fluorescent, and run \$45 a month or so. There is excellent teamwork here between agencies and the farmers like the set-up. While Ext owns the mimeographing, addressing, and folding machinery, all units use it.

We next drove the same day to Albion, Orleans County, where, at 20 Main St., we found the agencies in an old brick residence that had been fitted for office use. A. G. West was county agent, Horace C. Bird represented PMA, William Metcalf SCS and Coleman Petrie, though not in the building, was the

nearest FHA supervisor. The FHA was in the basement of the Court House and the PCA and FLB were also elsewhere. They were locally regarded as banks and their occupancy of the center would necessitate payment of taxes on the property. Both also, especially the FCA agencies, often offer problems because local bankers and credit agencies regard them as unwholesome rivals. A while back the agencies had rented a parsonage, but the rental was to be raised so Ext and ACP started to look for something else, as buying the building they rented would have cost too much. As they began to look around for purchase several likely places were grabbed off at prices higher than they could afford. However, a local physician bought this fine old brick residence, then he and his wife disputed as to whether their remaining funds should go to remodel his office space or the living quarters; this kept the deal in the air until the association could purchase after sending out letters to 800 farm bureau members and 700 in the home bureau and 4-H explaining intentions. Donations totaling \$12,000 came in. The owners wanted \$6000 for the residence but this rose to \$10,000 when a purchaser really appeared; the association put down \$1000 to hold the option and then went ahead. The building was already in quite fair shape and the first year a picnic was held where donated articles and animals were sold--including a steer and many large items--plus raffles and bingo; \$3700 was raised and the place was bought that year--1944. In 1945 another field day brought in \$2700 and others followed in later years. The agencies moved in May 1, 1946 with their money gone and after \$3000 had been borrowed from a bank by the Association--all being used to fit the place for office use. However, the place was essentially in the clear as occupied and on May 25 there was a grand opening with a great deal of local interest and 1000 enthusiastic visitors. A field day and a raffle netted \$3500--a car that was procured at cost being raffled and merchants buying exhibit space for

the field day--and the total take was \$6000, the \$3500 being derived from the car raffle alone. The total of such income to date was \$16,000 at an expense of \$9,000. At the time of our visit building and remodeling had all been paid for and there was \$1000 over, but a basement meeting room was needed. The latest field day had netted some \$5000. Some \$1500 worth of equipment had been purchased from the liquidating labor camps. Meanwhile the field days had developed into and replaced the county fair which was in bad odor, and the future looks good for field days. The place is owned by the Association and other occupants pay rent. These rentals total the \$1200 maintenance budget and ^{more} \$500/has now been tacked on to build up a repair fund. The janitor is not expensive as he also works 3 or 4 other places; fuel-oil heat is used. The usual reproducing and folding machinery is present for use by all. There is good agency and local teamwork here. There is a \$6000 reserve fund for the basement meeting room and for asphalt tiling of the floors, the former to be attended when and if prices come down. Total expenditures so far: \$22,000 of which \$12,000 represents remodeling and repair. This was about the first center in the State to get started, though others got completed earlier. Bird of PMA was described by the agent in the highest terms of praise and was so ethical that he refused to let his family eat support-price potatoes purchased for cattle feed even when they were far superior to those he purchased at regular prices for his family's consumption!

On November 2 we drove to Waterloo, Seneca County, where, at 15 Virginia St., we found agent H. L. Rhodes, Albert Gustafson of PMA, and Emil Kahabka of SCS in adjacent rented quarters in one ancient building. They moved in here in 1943, first the Farm Bureau, and then the Home Bureau came from Romulus. The then AAA had been with the Ext in rented quarters in Romulus. SCS was already in Waterloo. They all took these quarters in Waterloo at the same time.

But it is congested here, parking facilities are poor, and a committee is working on the possibility of building an agricultural center, a sort of faint future hope. The possibility of procuring quarters at Romulus or elsewhere in the county has also been considered. The FHA, formerly at Waterloo P.O., is now at Seneca Falls, Howard Hall, supervisor. The Association rents the Waterloo quarters from the bank and collects rentals from the others. While PMA has some equipment of its own it also uses the reproducing and addressing machinery of Ext. SCS uses the Ext mimeographing machine. The rental is \$125 a month and janitor, wash-room maintenance, and paper disposal are included. Our information came from Ext, the very helpful Extension Secretary, Mrs. L. E. Garrison, as the agent was out. The SCS man greatly admires this unified set-up; he says the less you know the other fellow the easier it is for you to regard him as a damned fool for doing what he does the way he does it; get to know him and his agency and you understand.

We next drove through Auburn to Syracuse, Onondaga County. Here J. Q. Foster was county agent in the Federal Bldg., and the State PMA chairman and his office were in rented quarters along with Herbert C. Walker, district conservationist, who was out. We met Charles Orcutt, the PMA administrative officer, who praised USDA in very high terms; Byron Leonard, executive officer for the State PMA; and Robert Howard, State PMA Chairman. Rentals are arranged by PMA; SCS sublets, and so does the Onondaga County ACP. PMA here would like 10 more copies of each issue of USDA as they find it so useful; the address is 236 West Genesee, Syracuse, N.Y. We drove on to Utica that day.

On November 3 we visited New Hartford, Oneida County, right outside of Utica, at 1 Oxford Road. Here are to be found county agent M. E. Hislop, SCS man Stanley Greene, Perry Smith of PMA, and Welland Wadsworth of PCA. The FHA supervisor operates from Oneida. There is a court house in Rome also--there

being 2 county seats. The building at New Hartford is an old Masonic Temple which the Masons built and occupied but could not retain. In 1940 county agents changed and Hislop came in. Ext was then in the courthouse in Utica, PMA was across the street, PCA in Rome, the SCS district unorganized. Ext was much cramped and parking space did not exist. A committee of farmers was created to explore the possibilities and to study sites where all agencies could be brought together. They found more farms within a radius of 15 miles of Utica than within the same distance of Rome and decided on New Hartford. They wanted to be near the railroad and the P.O. and to have ample parking facilities for meetings. Farmers also felt they had to dress up to go to the Utica office and they often delayed trips for this reason, so a place was desired where they could come in work clothing unembarrassed. The Masonic Temple was rented by the Association about 1942 with the idea of subletting to other agencies than Ext. About 1946 it went up for sale, the county board of supervisors first sought other housing, but finally bought the building for \$24,000 and now lease it to the Association at a rental of \$1 a year; it charges rent to the other occupants and this constitutes a separate housing budget. The county makes up deficits if the cost of operation exceeds the rentals, and regards this as rent for Ext. The 1948 budget was about \$5000, including janitor and all maintenance, and they collected \$1400 in rentals, the county board of supervisors willingly putting up the difference, because they feel the work is so beneficial to the county. The building is still about as it was, but considerable remodeling is contemplated and they may have to build at the back end. The newly acquired parking space proved insufficient so the county board purchased a large lot in back of the building and is grading it to accommodate the cars when folk come to meetings. About \$4500 has been raised by field days; this went mainly for equipment. Ext owns the mimeographing, addressing, and folding machinery;

others can use it though PMA has machines of its own. The building has 3 floors and all eventually will be used. The large meeting room would accommodate several hundred but the acoustics are poor. There is also a conference room and a smaller meeting room. A DHI central test laboratory will later go in and a bowling alley will be removed to give further space--it is now rented out. Ext here has a complete model to scale of a dairy barn set-up. SCS gets USDA; the boss here sends around a reading folder containing items and publications he regards as of interest to others in the office with spaces for them to mark names off and pass along; marked copies of USDA go into this.

The same day we continued on to Cobleskill, Schoharie County, where is the first SCS District organized in the State. The county agent is H. J. Pendergast, and in the agricultural headquarters the following also have offices: Earl Douglass and Sidney S. Buckley of SCS; Mrs. Lena L. Murray of PMA; Jens Johnson of PCA; and Allen Doggitt of FHA. The frame building has downstairs a bronze plate to the memory of Roy F. Pollard, agent from 1916-1944, who died soon after he retired, and who was the first agent for Schoharie. The SCS District was organized in 1940 before the building was up. The agencies were then located in the village where parking space was poor--that is Farm Bureau and AAA were, a rental; PCA was separate; FHA and SCS were in Schoharie itself, the county seat, though Ext had always remained in Cobleskill. It next had to move because the owner wanted to remake the property into apartments, so all agencies began to wonder if they couldn't get together. A committee was appointed to represent them all and a place over the town library was proposed but the contractor said it would cost \$14,000 to \$15,000 to remodel it. It also lacked a meeting room and space generally was inadequate. So just about at the end of the war it was decided to buy a site and build. Finally the site of an old burned-out feed store with considerable land was decided upon on the outskirts of town and it

was purchased. The old foundation it was found could be used and construction of the new building began in May 1946. This had once been the foundation of a hop-storage warehouse and the foundation was still good. A Cornell engineer drew up plans and a local contractor undertook to build on a cost-plus basis. The lot was sold for this center purpose for \$1000, in lieu of the \$3000 being asked. There were many headaches about building under immediate post-war conditions regarding both financing and materials and a planning committee was appointed to find ways and means of proceeding. The Association which owns the building began by soliciting \$100 each from several wealthy farmers and thus got about \$1500, and there were other smaller contributions. The Grange, the county fair, and other organizations contributed. The site is immediately across from that of the county fair. The building cost \$27,000 of which \$18,000 was borrowed from the bank, but all sorts of money-raising schemes were undertaken also. Tile flooring completed just before we got there had cost \$2600 this year. In 1947 the Association got a Ford at cost and raffled it off on the fair grounds during the fair, after having taken it around to other events also, and \$4500 was thus cleared--a fellow in another county who took 1 chance getting the car tho' local farmers often took 100 chances! Contributions have continued too. The income from office space rentals brings in \$3900 a year of which \$2000 is clear above maintenance and can be applied to repair, remodeling, or the mortgage. The place is economically maintained and the debt is now down to \$12,000, the total costs so far having been about \$30,000. The Board of Supervisors has contributed no funds whatever and the local Chamber of Commerce is not too sympathetic. In the 1949 raffle a television set procured at cost and other articles donated brought in about \$500 and sales of donated purebred cattle about \$750. There is a special building budget. Ext has reproducing, addressing, and folding machinery; PMA has its

own. The auditorium will seat about 150 and there is an acre or more of parking space. The Fair society has donated about a thousand dollars altogether. Everyone feels that it is advantageous for all agencies to be under one roof both to foster teamwork and farmer convenience. We found Supervisor Doggitt of FHA out, as he has 5 counties to cover but Miss Francis Conrow, the county clerk for FHA, was most cooperative. She is an admirer of and would-be contributor to USDA.

We went on to Oneonta, Otsego County, on November 3 and remained the night. Here we found Everett H. Clark, district conservationist, at 251 Main, was out; SCS moved here but recently from the county seat. The girl here was new and not very conversant with the work yet. We talked also to the FHA clerk, Florence V. Every, in the P.O. Building who would most like to know what the Housing Act will mean to her and her immediate office. Carl G. Graybeal the FHA supervisor was out.

November 4 we went on to Binghamton, Broome County, where county agent O. C. Barber liked USDA but wondered why it always reached him in bunches of 2 or 3 which made catching up reading it difficult. This is a common complaint. On the other hand, wherever it arrives--and only PMA is negligent--for there is no Federal worker in many PCA and FLB offices--it is well read, much appreciated, and regarded highly. The Broome County SCS Work Unit is housed in the Court House---Le Verne Clark is District Conservationist--and USDA comes regularly. There is a FPCA office at 4 Congdon where USDA does not come but there is no Federal employee, and a Miss Bradshaw was at the PMA office, who said they now do just what they always did only under different names from time to time--she seemed bewildered--and that Arthur Plough was in charge and USDA came regularly.

We drove on to Owego, Tioga County, where, at 200 Front St., A. R. Blanchard is county agent (out) and there is a branch office of the Ithaca PCA and FLB at 171 Front; the PMA-ACP is at 201 Front, and USDA comes at rare intervals.

At Elmira, Chemung County, talked to county agent R. A. Boehlecke who finds USDA of value and told the usual story told by city county agents; he also usually gets 2 copies of USDA at a time and wishes as do others that it would reach him sooner when less stale. In general, throughout this trip, the October 24 issue was arriving. There was a PCA office in the Keeney Bldg., with no Federal employee. Talked sometime to Mrs. Mary M. Bonsignore, county assistant for Saml. J. Smith, PMA-ACP, who, besides being disarmingly beautiful, had a remarkable grasp of her work and the work of her own and other agencies and talked intelligently about them, probably because she was a devoted reader and admirer of USDA. She was a relatively new employee. We left for Ithaca November 5, early.

The extent to which USDA is used everywhere as a source of items passed along in new letters and other local publications of all sorts was quite surprising to the editor.



